**Empower & Engage:**

**An evening of *listening and learning from family members from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds***

A very special thank you to:

Harriett A. Cox

Catherine Stevenson

Oge Ozo-Onyali

Alona Malacas

Ketia Stokes

Yvonne Hu-Cotto

***Words of wisdom from our experts*** (*notes by Dr Kay Holman)****:***

***Relationships***

**Advocate**

***COMMUNICATE***

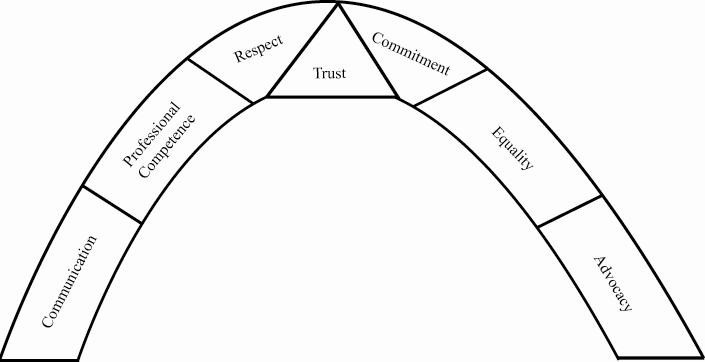
* Many families come to schools with fear, they see teachers as experts and they need information.
* **IEP**—tell parents what it is in simple language, explain the process, share helpful resources like Parent Place where people will walk through and explain the process and their rights (share information on a second grade level so parents can easily understand)
* **Jargon**—be mindful of the language that you use so parents can understand
* **Resources-**parents need you to share resources and give them information that can help the help their child
* **Connect families with families from their culture**-be the link, make yourself as accessible as possible
* Some families come from cultural backgrounds where they are **stigmatized** because of their child’s disability, therefore they may come to you with this kind of a **“schema”**—remember this when suggesting more restrictive placements (e.g., special schools), parents may need time, patience and additional information to be able to understand why you are making this recommendation, go above and beyond to **reassure** families
* **Include/infuse culture into curriculum**-even adding culturally diverse songs and text can help a family feel welcomed and the child feel accepted
* Be mindful of your **nonverbal communication** (e.g., facial expressions, body posture, etc.), our families are watching you and trying to glean as much as they can about what you are trying to communicate and your facial expression may be a barrier to what you are trying to communicate
* Some families come from more of a culture of “we” instead of “I”, remember this in your role as a connector
* **Facilitate friendships** in your classroom-some families have come here with little to no family and feel very isolated do what you can to be a connector and create meaningful relationships between your students and the families
* Families need opportunities to meet all of the teachers and related professionals from the school and get to know the family
* **Be approachable**
* Lay out and explain the services that you offer, introduce families to the related service providers when school starts
* Parents of children with disabilities and especially those who do not have the capacity to communicate verbally are worried about **bullying**-create opportunities to be leaders and spread awareness and acceptance in your school
* **IEP meetings**
  + some families from African American backgrounds do not like to share personal information (for example, I do not know how to help my child do something at home) in front of a group of strangers at the IEP table. It is not culturally comfortable to share “their business” with others
  + Don’t wait until the IEP meeting to share information with families, chunk it up and meet with them and communicate frequently
  + Advocate for your parents
  + Make sure your parents understand everything that was shared at the meeting before you leave—take the time to ask the if they understand, watch their facial expressions and look for those looks of doubt or misunderstanding and help to clarify
  + Model for your parents what it looks like to advocate for their child so that they can become their child’s best advocate
* Be a **programmer**-if you see a need, fill it, be creative and **go above and beyond**, train your staff and 1:1s, it is your responsibility to keep your students safe
* Teachers: do what you can so your families feel and know that “**you have their back”**
* Don’t be afraid to tell parents what is going on with their child, the more they know the more they can help at home-
  + Parents want to have a role in their child’s success

Thank you for joining us for this special learning opportunity,

**Kay Holman & Liz O’Hanlon**

**Department of Special Education**

**Towson University**

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**The Seven Partnership Practices, Turnbull & Turnbull, 2010**